

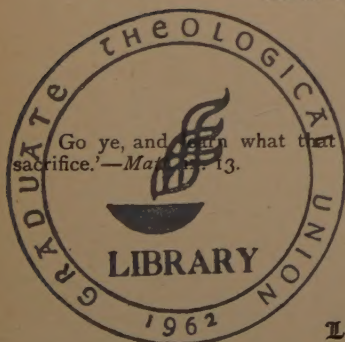
MODERN PHASES OF THE ATONEMENT

SOME
MODERN PHASES
OF THE
DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

EXHIBITING ITS OBSCURE AND UNCERTAIN
CHARACTER

BY
G. VANCE SMITH, B.A.

PHILOS. & THEOL. DOCT.



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NOTE.

IN preparing the following pages I have made considerable use of my own book, 'The Bible and its Theology' (1892). This applies more especially to § 3 and § 6, which are founded upon Chapters XXIV. and XXVI. of that work. References omitted in the Essay for the sake of brevity will be found fully given in the chapters named, and to these accordingly the reader is referred.

G. V. S.

Bath, *September*, 1894.

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SOME MODERN PHASES OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT.

BY G. VANCE SMITH.

§ 1. The Atonement Doctrine—Its obscure and uncertain character—Fact and Theory.

IT will probably surprise many readers to be told that the important word Atonement is a great stranger in the New Testament. It occurred in a single instance in the old or Authorised Version (*Rom. v. 11*) but has been excluded as incorrect from the Revised Version of 1881 and changed into the word Reconciliation. This, it may be, was the meaning intended by our translators of 1611, in their use of the former word.¹ But this is not certain.

The term in question being gone, it may, however, be held that the subject matter represented by it, the Doctrine of Atonement, nevertheless remains; and that it is in fact expressed or directly implied in many a familiar verse, whether of the Authorised or of the Revised version. This view of the case will doubtless be taken by those who read the New Testament expressions alluded to in the

¹ At-one-ment—putting-at-one, that is, reconciling, reconciliation.

light of the received teaching of our time. The question then arises, *what* is the doctrine thus supposed to remain firmly embedded in the Christian books, even though the word which has so long been its accepted representative has been removed?

This question it is not so easy to answer as might at first sight appear. Theological writers differ from each other in an extraordinary way in their views as to what ought to be understood by this doctrine; they differ from each other so seriously as to create a presumption which is fatal to the authoritative character usually ascribed to it. For surely a doctrine which has been so diversely conceived and stated must in its original records be obscure and uncertain. The further presumption is inevitable, that a doctrine so vague and dark,—a doctrine, moreover, which for its exposition and defence needs all the elaborate treatment met with in modern works on the subject,¹ cannot be so essential a part of Christianity as it is commonly said to be. It is not reasonable to believe that any fact or dogma the right acceptance of which is a vital part of Christian faith can have been left to us in such a position that its holders and advocates should have to question and discuss among themselves, to differ widely from each other, even contradicting one another in their statements, as to what it is which is deemed so essential.

Here, however, a position of some importance is not to be overlooked. By some it is maintained that while the *fact* of the atonement is clearly affirmed in the New Testament, we are not called upon to supply a theory (*i.e.*, a doctrine) to explain it. The Christian writers, it is admitted, do not explain it, but simply declare as a truth of revelation that the forgiveness of sin is granted through,

¹ See among many others, Dr. R. W. Dale's *Congregational Union Lectures* (Ed. 1892); also the *Essay on Atonement in Lux Mundi* (Ed. 1892).

or in virtue of, the death of Christ.¹ But even if this be so, are we to be precluded from inquiring into the nature of so potent and interesting a cause and its related consequences? Granting the fact as alleged, it may still be asked, what sins are affected by it? Are they simply the breaches of that ancient ceremonial law of the Jews for which sacrifices and atonements were so carefully provided, and of which so much is said in the older Scriptures? or are they the more heinous sins of which men are still, as of old, so often and so terribly guilty?—or, again, does the forgiveness affect only the ‘original guilt,’ which, as some will tell us, every human being inherits through his descent from the first transgressor? If this last be the case, then certainly we ought to satisfy ourselves of the reality of that baneful inheritance. No slight enterprise! for its scientific absurdity and essential injustice are demonstrable to every thoughtful and free-minded man.

Assuming, however, that sin in its worst and widest sense is intended, what is the ‘forgiveness’ for it which is said to result from the Death? Is there now *no punishment* for sin? Is the sinner permitted, in this life or any other, to *escape* the consequences of his wickedness?—or do not these still come home to him, seen or unseen by human eyes, and whether in this world or in that which is to be hereafter? If he is ‘forgiven,’ if punishment does not strike, what is the meaning of that future perdition of which theologians have had so much to tell? It has not surely ceased to await the sinner. If not, then we must conclude his sins are still visited by their punishment, and the alleged forgiveness is more in name than in reality.

It is impossible, therefore, to avoid the inquiry, what

¹ Thus Dr. R. F. Horton on the Atonement in the volume entitled *Faith and Criticism*.

is the nature of the fact of atonement? Nor can we, as rational thinkers, escape the duty of ascertaining if possible, both what the fact is that is alleged, and why it is so constantly presented to us as an all-essential element of Christian religion. All this again involves us in a theory, a doctrine, even in spite of ourselves, and whether it be purely speculative or legitimately founded on such positive historical considerations as may be within our reach. In short, the Atonement of Reconciliation in the New Testament is indeed and unquestionably a *fact*; but, as we hope to show in these pages, it is one which does not attribute evil-doing or injustice to God; nor is it one that is incapable of being rightly apprehended by man; it is such rather as any earnest, thoughtful reader of the Bible may reasonably be expected to inquire into, with a view to its defence and explanation.

§ 2. Unsatisfactory Explanations.

It is easy to collect from the Christian books a multitude of expressions¹ which speak of the death of Christ and connect that dread event more or less closely with the remission of sin. But, as already pointed out, it is admitted, and indeed is manifest on the face of the sacred page, that there is nowhere any definition of the nature of that connection; no definite statement anywhere to be found in the Christian writings of the *how* or the *why* the death of Christ causes or accounts for that forgiveness. The explanations usually elaborated by theologians

¹ In the Appendix to Dr. Dale's work before referred to, a considerable list of such expressions will be found. Strange to say, little attempt is made in that work to investigate the meaning that would be attached to the words by a Jewish-Christian reader of Paul's time. The ordinary orthodox meaning of our day is simply *assumed*, with little allowance even for figurative language!

are too purely conjectural to be either satisfying or authoritative. We are repeatedly told, for example, by Dr. Dale, that 'the Death of Christ is the objective ground on which the sins of men are remitted.'¹ This is surely a little too vague, and fails to convey any clear idea to the reader. Nor is its vagueness relieved by the remarks which accompany the statement: 'The sufferings [of Christ] were his, that they might not be ours. He endured them that we might escape from them.' What sufferings that might be 'ours' are meant? Those of this present life are here with us in manifold forms, all over the world; they are seen in the miserable fruits of iniquity everywhere. We do *not* 'escape from them.' These actual or temporal sufferings of men are not therefore those from which the death of Christ has delivered them. Is it then the sufferings of a future world from which unrighteous men are saved? But according to popular orthodox teaching the torments of hell are not ended. Sinners innumerable are falling into the eternal fires every day, every hour of the world's existence. How then can it be said that sins are 'remitted,' or that men are 'delivered' from the consequences of their evil-doing, by the divine forgiveness of which the death of Christ is 'the objective ground'? This is an example of the singular inconsistency, or rather self-contradiction, involved in popular teaching, even as found in the pages of one of the most able and earnest of its expounders.

Will it, however, be said that if men are 'lost,' it is their own fault?—that they have only to come to Christ, repent and 'believe' to secure their salvation, relying ever on the efficacy of the great sacrifice? that the atonement is therefore not fruitless, but effectual for *all* that will avail themselves of it? Be it so; but still it

¹ *The Atonement* pp. lxii., lxiv., lxx.

must be asked, What proportion of sinful men do this? How many, or how few, outside of the regions of Calvinistic theology, if any such regions are still left? How many, or how few comparatively of the world's thousand millions feel that they partake of this great conditional salvation? This question must here be left unanswered, but with one remark: so few, in comparison, must the 'saved' be, as only to show how purely unreal and nominal is the 'forgiveness' said to have been wrought for the world by the death of Christ, as set forth in the ordinary doctrine (or doctrines?) of atonement. How vain, therefore, is the pretence of his having borne 'the sufferings that ought to have been ours,' and released us from them!

But, indeed, the respected author from whom the above words are quoted, like many others before him, is fain to acknowledge the 'mystery' in which the whole subject is enveloped, and which, from his point of view, evidently baffles the efforts of such speculations—imaginative, arbitrary, and unauthorised as they are. Yes, indeed, the subject, as commonly treated, is surrounded by mystery enough; and this is not to be dissipated by conjectural theories, so purely artificial, so void of the element of justice,—so entirely, in short, the product of human ignorance presuming to speak as if it were able to penetrate into the unfathomable depths of the Divine mind.

§ 3. Various Theories and Statements.

The vagueness, logical inconsistency, and boldness in speculation just spoken of will be found to be largely exemplified in various quarters, to which more especial attention must now be given.

(1) The Articles of the Church of England claim our

notice as containing a long-established and widely received form of the atonement doctrine. Article II. declares in relation to Christ that he 'truly suffered to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice not only for original guilt but also for actual sins of men.' Article XXXI. reads thus: 'The offering of Christ, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world both original and actual.' The idea intended by some of these terms is by no means self-evident. But the doctrine contained in them at least implies that God needed to be 'reconciled,' which again must imply that He was in some sense angry with men on account of their sins, but that Christ by his sufferings and death propitiated, that is, appeased, him and in some way, satisfied him, in regard to all the sins of the whole world. Truly a gross and anthropomorphic conception of the great Father of spirits—one not unworthy of those ancient days when a Jupiter or an Apollo was supposed to be pleased with a hecatomb of slaughtered victims.

(2) This interpretation of the two articles is justified by the words of an eminent expositor of the teaching of our national Church, the late Archbishop Thomson of York. 'The clouds of God's anger,' he writes, 'gathered thick over the whole human race; they discharged themselves on Jesus only. . . . He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. . . . He who alone was no child of wrath meets the shock of the thunderstorm, becomes a curse for us, and a vessel of wrath, and the rays of wrath break out of that thunder gloom, and shine on the bowed head of Him who hangs on the cross dead for our sins.' Again the archbishop writes, 'He came to reconcile men and God by dying on the cross for them, and bearing their punishment in their stead. . . . The wrath of God was against man, but it did not fall on man.'

. . . . Jesus suffered though men had sinned.’¹ In such terrible language as this it is plain that we have the principle of substitution and vicarious punishment in no doubtful form. The Divine Father inflicts upon the innocent Jesus the penalty of suffering which ought to have fallen on sinful men and these are permitted to escape. ‘And thus,’ the archbishop adds, ‘the Atonement was a manifestation of Divine justice’!

(3) But then, strange to say, this exposition of the doctrine is *denied* by another eminent member of the same Church. The late Archbishop Magee (also of York), dismisses in the strongest language ‘the notion of the transfer of penalties from one person to another,’—virtually rejecting the incredible and baseless theory of his predecessor. Dr. Magee refers all, not to the *wrath*, but to the *love* of God;² but how or why the Infinite Love should have demanded the fearful propitiation of suffering and death, and that too from such a victim as Jesus, the archbishop does not explain.³

(4) Another eminent pillar of the English establishment agrees, however, with Archbishop Thomson in laying the chief stress on the substitution of Christ in bearing the punishment due to sinners and thus satisfying the claims of Divine justice. ‘The idea of substitution,’ Bishop Ellicott writes, ‘can never be eliminated from any true doctrine of the Atonement.’ (*Salutary Doctrine*, pp. 75-6).

(5) Leaving these great Church dignitaries thus to disagree with each other as to the nature of the Atonement, we may turn to another learned prelate of the same Church who has recently written on the subject, and ask

¹ *Aids to Faith*, p. 332.

² Dr. Horton also repudiates this idea of the wrath of God as ‘revolting.’—*Faith and Criticism*, p. 211.

³ *Helps to Belief: The Atonement*, by W. C. Magee, D.D., &c., 1887.

which side of the discussion he takes. Bishop Thorold (of Winchester) appears to set little value on the sufferings of Christ. He does not think that pain, as pain, avails to satisfy or propitiate the Divine Being. It was 'the beauty of the perfect sacrifice, the filialness of the submitted will, the spotless holiness, . . . that was the acceptable and sufficient atonement in the sight of a Holy God' (*Good Words*, 1891, pp. 214, 215). The bishop does not give us his authority for these statements, but quotes in explanation of his meaning the words of a hymn,—

‘I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us
From the accursed load.’

He then proceeds, ‘When I cast my guilt on Him, He puts his righteousness on me; for my sins He exchanges his obedience. Having made peace through the blood of his cross, He bestows that peace on me and I am at rest.’ The bishop gives no Scripture warrant for these very positive assertions; but it is clear that we have here again the unmoral idea of substitution,—unmoral, because the conscience, even of ill-trained, ordinary men, feels it to be outrageously wrong to put guilt and its punishment upon one who has done no evil, and to let the guilty man go free; unmoral again, because even among imperfect and sinful men such a thing as vicarious punishment, the punishment of one man for another would not be tolerated, and it may safely be said is never practised by civilized men who have any regard for justice in their treatment of wrong-doers.

(6) Other examples of inconsistency, or of vagueness, or also sometimes of self-contradiction, in the statements of various exponents of the Atonement are easily found. The ‘Declaration of Faith,’ for instance, issued by the

Congregational Union, expresses the doctrine of a large and important section of English Nonconformists. It informs us respecting Christ that 'by his obedience to the Divine Law while he lived and by his sufferings unto death he meritoriously obtained eternal redemption for us, having thereby vindicated and illustrated Divine justice, magnified the law and brought in everlasting righteousness.' The ideas thus expressed, somewhat dark in themselves, may be interpreted by the doctrinal schedule of a model deed for chapel trusts of the same denomination. This speaks plainly of the 'fall and depravity of man,' of Christ's 'sacrificial death for the sins of mankind,' and of 'everlasting punishment,' but how 'everlasting righteousness' was 'brought in,' it does not explain, nor is it very easy to understand, considering the vice and wickedness now prevailing even in the so-called Christian world!

Similiar doctrines are held by the Wesleyan communion. These tell us of the miserable consequences of sin, through which 'all mankind are under the wrath and curse of God, and so are made liable to the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell hereafter.' (Wesleyan *Catechism*, No. 2). From these consequences we are to be redeemed by faith in Christ, and by our participation in his righteousness, the good fruit of faith. Here we have substitution again, the sinful put in the place of the righteous on the same easy conditions as affirmed by Bishop Thorold.

(7) An interesting addition to these views of the Atonement has been afforded by the writings of a certain section of the national clergy. These writers practically dissent from the more usual teaching of the churches, and as it would appear, from the statements of their own Articles, as above cited. They maintain very freely, and no doubt, truly, that there can be nothing meritorious

in mere suffering; that suffering in the form of physical or mental agony cannot be thought peculiarly acceptable to God. The sufferings and death of Christ, therefore, are not to be regarded as that which pleased or satisfied the all-merciful Father; nor did Jesus, in short, suffer and die as the Article states 'to reconcile his Father to us.' It was not this which constituted the propitiatory efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. It was his voluntary obedience and humiliation, his submission even unto death, his renunciation of his own and acceptance of the Father's will. This moral element it was which made his death an acceptable sacrifice, and upon this did God look down with grace and satisfaction. 'In the whole of the two Testaments' (thus it is affirmed) 'there is not a single passage which states unambiguously the doctrine that Christ received at God's hands the punishment decreed to our sins and thus enabled Him to forgive us.'¹

This last representation is in substance correct; but it is by no means so *new* as to many persons it might have appeared when coming from clerical pens. Similar expositions of the Christian teaching, and similar protests against popular perversions of it have long been familiar in certain quarters—among those however who have not had the advantage of speaking from the national pulpits, and who indeed have been mostly looked upon as the merest heretics, standing outside of the pale of Christianity. Here is a passage from one of the writers and preachers of the older times alluded to, taken from a tract by the late Dr. Lant Carpenter.¹ 'It is nowhere declared that the death of Christ . . . enabled God to forgive; that God could not forgive sin without a satisfac-

¹ The reader is referred to *The Bible and its Theology* (1892) for various works on which these statements are founded, in cases where the works are not again expressly cited.

tion by the vicarious punishment of an innocent person. It is nowhere declared that the sufferings of Christ were a punishment at all, . . . it is nowhere declared that the death of Christ appeased the wrath of God, rendered Him propitious, made Him merciful, or disposed Him to forgive.'

(8) Among the more recent theorizers on the nature and effects of the Atonement, the eloquent writer in the work entitled *Lux Mundi* holds a notable place. The Saviour, he gives us to understand, bore the sufferings entailed by sin, 'not that we might be freed from them,'¹ but 'that he might lead man along the same path of suffering, not "free" but gladly submissive to the pains which but for him would be the overwhelming penalties of our sins.' Thus then man is not released from the sufferings consequent on sin, but only taught or led to submit to them gladly! It is not clear whether the sufferings of this life are meant or those of the future. As to the latter, whether the sufferings of the future world can be borne by the sinner 'gladly' or sadly, nothing can be known, though some recent writers have gone so far as to speak of 'happiness in hell.' Supposing, however, the sufferings of this life to be meant, it is clear that the Atonement, as already pointed out, has brought to man no great result.

For again it must be asked, have not men still to suffer much as of old? Is not sin still, as ever, followed by its terrible retributions, as seen too often in the experience of common life? If, however, man is not benefited in point of suffering, by the Atonement, perhaps we should at least conclude that, in some mysterious way, God is so! His insulted justice is 'satisfied' by the sufferings of the

¹ The reader will compare this with the words cited from Dr. Dale: to the effect that Christ bore the sufferings that might have been ours 'That we might escape from them.'

righteous substitute, and so He can let the guilty go free : as in the words of Bishop Thorold's hymn, the sinner lays his sins on Jesus and himself escapes. This may not be expressly alleged in the essay now referred to, but it is involved and bound up in this speculative theory as in others. And thus, so far as can be learnt from *Lux Mundi*, the great scheme of salvation by the sacrifice of Christ is but an empty name, without substantial results, and at the same time contrary to nature and to the healthy, rational instincts of the unsophisticated mind.

For truly the cultivated reason and conscience clearly pronounce it to be wrong to put the penal consequences of sin, not on the guilty man, but on another who is substituted for him. To do this, moreover, involves a two-fold wrong : it 'charges God foolishly' with acting in a way which civilised law and the moral feeling of mankind alike repudiate ; and it makes the sinner, the guilty man, who has the supposed benefit of this injustice, fill the purely selfish part of profiting by his own wrong ; that is to say, by the sufferings and death of another, to which his own evil conduct is a contributing factor. With unthoughtful and superstitious minds, the tendency of such ideas, whether in this modified *Lux Mundi* form or any kindred form, can only be to encourage sin rather than to repress it. But we may rejoice to believe such ideas are no part of the Christian Gospel. They belong to the ages of ancient ignorance ; and in whatever connection they may be presented, whether in the Articles and Creeds of established churches, or in the doctrinal formulas of non-conformist bodies, they are out of harmony with a religion which inculcates a spiritual worship and the practical doing of the will of God as the only true way to win his blessing.

§ 4. Conflicting theories—Dr. Dale or Dr. Horton?

At the commencement of this Essay notice was taken of the Atonement theory as elaborated by Dr. Dale. This, we have seen, informs us that the death of Christ is 'the objective ground' of the remission of sin. The expression, it is evident, adds nothing to the New Testament statements, which affirm that Christ 'died for us,' or 'died for our sins.' It simply repeats the latter in a different form of words and leaves the idea where it was. Apart from this, the theory of Dr. Dale is not in its details found satisfactory by a friendly critic, whose name has been already introduced in these pages. Dr. Horton, speaking with all respect and sympathy of the views of his co-religionist, yet dissents materially from his statements. He gives the following account of Dr. Dale's theory. The passage is quoted here, with the omission for brevity's sake, of a few non-essential words:—

'In the concluding chapters [of Dr. Dale's volume] . . . the author attempts to lay down a theory to explain the fact of the Atonement on which he has been insisting. The theory is a modification of Anselm's. The eternal law of righteousness takes the place of the personal honour of God. This law is violated by sin and must be repaired by some satisfaction offered to it. The sufferings of Christ offer this reparation. But how and why? Briefly because the person of Christ is identical with the law of righteousness on the one hand, and on the other Christ himself holds an essential relation to the human race which was originally made in his image.¹ In place of the punishment

¹ It is hardly necessary to point out that this implied reference to *Gen. i. 26* involves a departure from the original purport of that verse. The expression is anthropomorphic; the same words for *image* and *likeness* being used as in *Gen. iv. 1, 3*, where Seth is said to have been born in the 'image' of Adam. Besides how does it appear that the Elohim of *Gen. i.* was Christ?

which should rightly fall on man from the violated law of righteousness, the law itself in the person of Jesus endures the sufferings which punishment would have entailed. "In the death of Christ He to whom it belongs to inflict suffering endures suffering instead of inflicting it."

The reader will observe the final sentence of this paragraph. It is taken *verbatim* from the work cited (Dale, *Atonement*, p. 393). There is more to a similar effect in the same context. Assuming that the words have their ordinary meaning, it is passing strange that any well instructed man should write such a sentence: 'He to whom it belongs to inflict suffering endures suffering instead of inflicting it'; that is to say God (in Christ) inflicts suffering upon himself! How purely conjectural and imaginary these statements are, how entirely unwarranted by any thing in the New Testament, will to many persons appear self-evident. Dr. Horton observes, 'The theory does not satisfy the reader.' He further objects, 'We are still without any valid instance in human experience to illustrate how a broken *law* can be repaired by suffering the penalty which it ought to inflict. . . . conceding that God is bound by his own nature to punish sins we cannot see the intrinsic reasonableness of Himself suffering instead of inflicting the punishment, or how from self-inflicted pain He derives the power to forgive sins' (Horton, *Essay*, pp. 96-7).

These objections are mildly put. The theory to which they apply is not merely a pure speculation, without foundation in the New Testament; is it not in two words entirely fanciful and incredible, if not absurd?

Dr. Horton himself proceeds on much safer ground. He is contented to point out that the mystery of the Atonement is insoluble. It is not, he tells us, explained in the Christian books: 'The New Testament *has no theory*

about the Atonement. These words he emphasises; and again observes, ' . . . the orthodoxy of the New Testament does not include a theory of the Atonement at all ' (p. 222). Such statements clearly amount to an abandonment of all the older 'orthodox' ideas on this subject. Thus do these two eminent theologians neutralize or refute one another! It can hardly improve matters, from Dr. Horton's point of view, to insist as he does, that while no theory (or doctrine) of Atonement can be formulated, yet that the *fact* of atonement remains the same and undisturbed; that the fact is there though the *theory* be gone! On this position some remarks have been made in the first section of this Essay, and we need not go over the ground a second time.

In spite of this disclaimer on the part of an earnest believer in the ordinary idea of Atonement, theories, that is, doctrines, embodying that idea abound, as we have sufficiently seen in the foregoing pages. Such theories are not to be dismissed or put out of court by a mere refusal to see them, or by a verbal denial of them. Inconsistent, self-contradictory, unwarranted as they are, they stand there, enduring monuments of the speculative folly of those who would be wise above what is written.

As the result of these considerations, the conclusion remains as certain as any thing of the kind can be, that the older forms of the doctrine of Atonement,—including such ideas as vicarious punishment, propitiation, satisfaction of the Divine wrath or justice, expiation of one man's sin by the sufferings of another, and so forth,—are not tenable; and that some other explanation of the New Testament language respecting the death of Christ must be sought. Is it attainable?

§ 5. **Mystery—Arbitrary and Unwarranted Speculation—
The Climax—The True Atonement.**

Before proceeding to answer this question, it will be well to take notice of several points not yet made sufficiently prominent.

The writers hitherto named seem to agree very much in one respect, although they differ from each other so seriously as we have seen. Our authorities, episcopal and nonconformist, all speak of the 'mystery' in which their subject is involved. This admission, in various forms, is of frequent occurrence in their writings. Bishop Thorold, as before cited, admits that it is impossible in such a subject for the human intellect fully to understand—what he, nevertheless, and others write so freely about—or to avoid inconsistency and self-contradiction. And what other result could be anticipated where license is so readily given to ingenious theorising,—combined, as it is, with a singular forgetfulness of the historical conditions of the problem? The speculative theologian laying aside considerations of ordinary morality—those usual dictates of the rational conscience by which men are guided in common life—feels himself at liberty to discuss and expound the very thoughts and motives of the Divine Mind. Dr. Dale goes so far as to speak of its being 'possible for God at once to endure and to inflict penal suffering, and to do both under conditions which constitute the infliction and the endurance the grandest moment in the moral history of God.' (*Atonement*, p. 393.) The closing words of this sentence are amazing, but they will hardly bear comment. What does, or can, any mortal mind really know of 'the moral history of God'? Is it an essential part of that history to represent the Divine Being as following modes of proceeding from which sinful man

would shrink with horror and detestation—as, for example, in inflicting the disproportionate and monstrous punishment of everlasting misery for the sins of a short lifetime, or in putting the unutterable weight of suffering due to a guilty world upon one innocent and righteous person, who, moreover, according to the record, did not submit unreluctantly, but prayed in his agony that the cup might pass from him ?

(2) It cannot escape notice how artificial and arbitrary are the reasons assigned, under these doctrinal schemes, for the Divine forgiveness of sin. A victim is made to suffer, and God forthwith accepts and pardons the sinner, provided that he by his assent and ‘faith’ participates in some sense in the act of sacrifice. But what essential connection, logical, causal, or moral, is there, or can there be, between the slaughter or the agonies of an animal or any other conceivable victim, on the one side, and the changed attitude of the Supreme towards sin on the other ? There is nothing here, in truth, but what is imaginary, unfounded in any principle of right or reason, and—must it not be said—unnatural and superstitious.

(3) And then comes the climax, as already pointed out: the consequences of sin are *not*, after all, really remitted to the sinner. These have to be borne all the same. Sinful men, according to popular teaching, are daily dying and passing into the eternal suffering, the ‘atonement’ that has been made notwithstanding. God, we are told, is enabled by the great sacrifice to forgive in accordance with his supreme justice, yet he does not forgive—unless it be to a select few who are said to have ‘faith’ in this marvellous scheme of so-called atonement, and who by virtue of their faith are enabled to appropriate its saving virtues to themselves—faith, which in many a case, or in most, may be unenlightened and purely superstitious.

(4) System-making theologians do not seem duly to recognise the great fact that a certain punishment for sin is in truth mercifully bound up with our nature,—appointed for the sinner by the Creator himself. It is not indeed such as to overpower the freedom of our own human will, to prevent us in advance by a kind of force from doing wrong. But it gives the sinner warning by the uneasiness which attends or anticipates conscious wrongdoing, or by the remorse and the sense of unworthiness which follow wrongdoing, and from which in all probability even the most untrained and callous are not wholly exempt. This kind of punishment comes sooner or later—a dread reality of the Divine government. It is not to be averted by the sacrifice of victims, or by its transfer to another party. And it suggests to us in no doubtful way what is the true expiation of sin before the All-righteous; for that this can only be in the sinner's return to right ways, in his penitence, his resistance of passion and self-indulgence, his seeking to undo or remedy the wrong he has done to another, his turning to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. Such is the true expiation of sin, the true propitiation. Thus does the prophet of old teach us; and this, too, may be plainly seen in the clear light of that gracious spirit,—the spirit of Christ,—which so emphatically declares that obedience is better than sacrifice.

§ 6. The New Testament language respecting the Death of Christ.

It remains to inquire whether, apart from all speculation, the Christian writings do not themselves afford the means of removing the 'mystery' before spoken of, and of substituting for unwarranted conjecture something that is based upon reasonable historical evidence.

It is hardly necessary to begin with the remark that it is right to interpret Scripture in the sense in which it was originally intended; and that the sacred books should be read therefore in the light of such historical considerations as are known to us,—considerations relating to the circumstances, the persons, the ideas, the prejudices, the ignorance, of the times in which the books were written. This position is usually conceded, as a matter of course, though too often forgotten, especially by those who have a systematic theology to build up. It has long been acknowledged by biblical scholars of the highest class, from Bishop Marsh downwards to Bishop Ellicott in our own day.

Let us then remember, in the first place, that it was not expected by the people of Christ's time that the Messiah would die. In *John* xii. 34, this belief is referred to. So, when Jesus spoke to his disciples of his going up to Jerusalem to be crucified and put to death, we are told that 'they understood none of these things' (*Matt.* xvi. 21, 22). But the crucifixion brought them understanding. In time their eyes were opened, and they were led to the belief that their master must needs pass from this earthly life before he could enter upon his spiritual kingdom. They learnt that Jesus died in his mortal body, in order that he might be raised again, and, 'ascending up on high,' might become the spiritual 'Head over all things to the Church,' that he might reign over all as the spiritual Christ. By birth, he was a Jew; he was 'born under the law,' and he was subject naturally to the same restraints in regard to intercourse with the heathen world which were conceived to attach to all of Jewish race. Of the outcast Gentile nations, none could of right be disciples of the Christ, the Jewish Messiah; and the limitation would appear to have been recognised by Jesus himself: 'I am

not sent,' he said, 'but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' In accordance with these ideas, the centurion Cornelius was ritually 'unclean,' and in a state of sin, though 'a just man, and one that feared God.' He was not admissible, therefore, as a disciple of the Christ, a subject of the Messiah, without first in effect conforming to Judaism. Even an apostle is represented as saying to him that it was an unlawful thing for a man that was a Jew to keep company with, or come unto, one of another nation. (See *Acts* x., xi.) And we know from *Gal.* i., ii. that the same apostle, on a later occasion, found it a hard task to rise above this prejudice. Thus all who were not by birth or conversion Jews were only as 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,' 'strangers' who could have no part in those 'covenants of promise' which God had given to his chosen people. They could not therefore, 'by nature' (in their Gentile state), be disciples of a Hebrew Messiah. To become such, they must first enter into the fold of Israel, and thus put away the ritual disqualification, the state of sin, attaching to them as Gentiles. In illustration of these statements, see again *Acts* xv., *Ephes.* ii.

Such was the strong prejudice of the primitive Christian times. Had it prevailed with all the early Christians, it would have led to the perversion and ultimate extinction of the new religion. But the death of the Messiah enabled his followers to conceive of the relation in which he stood to the Gentile world as having undergone a great change. Being dead and ascended to his heavenly throne, he was no longer a mortal man, a Jew; under the Law of his people. The Apostle Paul alludes to this in several expressions. The earliest statement in which this altered conception is involved occurs in the Epistle to the Romans: 'Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law hath

dominion over a man so long as he liveth?' Thus he writes, and he goes on to state in illustration how that one who is dead is released from the law, just as a wife who had been bound to her husband is freed from similar restraints by his death. In a previous verse, Paul speaks of those who are 'baptised into Jesus Christ,' as 'baptised into his death,' as partaking of his death, and being 'dead with Christ,' and with him, therefore, dead to the law. (*Rom. vi., vii. ; Col. ii. 20.*)

The death of the Christ had thus a twofold operation. Him it released from the law, and it released others also. Partaking of his death by baptism, they too are freed from the control of the law. They may live now, not to the law, but 'in newness of spirit,' and 'unto God.' Such was the 'mystery' of 'a crucified Christ,' which mystery 'had been hid from ages and from generations.' (*Ephes. iii. 3-12*). The risen and exalted Saviour now reigns over all men alike. He is accessible, not by Jewish rites of circumcision or other ritualistic 'works,' but by simple 'faith'—the belief and reverence of discipleship. Jew and Gentile are henceforth alike to him. 'There is no difference' in God's sight, or in Christ's. If they will receive the Messiah by the faith, the love, the obedience proper to the disciple, this will admit them to his kingdom and his church. God (the apostle writes) will freely forgive past sins of disqualification to all, whether ritual or actual, for that faith of theirs in the risen Christ. (*Rom. iii.; viii. 34 ; x. 9-12*).

Let it next be observed how strong was the feeling of the Jews in reference to their own righteousness and the sinfulness of the outside world. 'Sinners of the Gentiles,' 'dead in trespasses and sins,' 'by nature children of wrath.' Such are the phrases in which this feeling is expressed. (*Ephes. ii.*) But, then, the Jews too, in Paul's

view, were 'under sin.' 'By the works of the law' could no flesh be really justified (made righteous), for 'by the law is the knowledge of sin.' But a merciful God, the apostle taught, had opened out a new way of justification, independently of the law, to all who would accept Jesus as Christ, that is to say, by 'faith in Christ Jesus.' This, too, was done by the All-wise 'freely, by his grace.' It was not a purchased boon: it was not because his 'wrath' was appeased or satisfied by the sacrifice or sufferings of any victim. This is nowhere stated in the Christian books. 'It is the *gift* of God,' not a thing bought with a price, except in so far as this might be figuratively said (*1 Cor.* vi. 20, vii. 23). Nothing in all the New Testament is clearer than the doctrine of the free and unpurchased nature of the Christian redemption, as on the side of God, and this is in truth the central fact of the glad tidings. The words 'for Christ's sake,' so common in modern theological phrases, do not occur in the New Testament in reference to any act or motive of God.¹

Faith in the risen Christ then, according to these Pauline ideas conferred an equal or a better 'justification' upon sinful Gentiles as well as upon Jews, and this qualified them all alike for discipleship. The barrier of the law which had kept them apart was broken down by the death of the Christ, because he was now released from the law, and it had no longer dominion over him or over them. And this had come to pass, and could only be by the death of the Messiah which released him from the claims of the law. Thus he died *for* them; he died for '*all*,' Gentiles as well as Jews.

It may now be seen, without further exposition, in

¹ *Ephes.* iv. 32, in the Authorised Version is only a mistranslation for 'in (by) Christ.'—See the Revised New Testament.

what sense Christ died, 'the just for the unjust.' He died in their behalf, for their benefit; it might even be said that he died in their *stead*—a phrase, however, which occurs only once, *Matt.* xx. 28, parallel with *Mark* x. 45. His death, admitting men to the new justification by faith, *Rom.* x. 6-9, saved them in effect from the punishment which would otherwise justly have fallen upon them. *They* deserved to suffer, but God was merciful, and He permitted his Son, Messiah, to suffer instead,—*not* as bearing their *punishment*, which is nowhere alleged, but simply to open a new way of admission for them; *not* therefore as their substitute, *not* to redeem them from eternal misery, and *not* (as Archbishop Thomson would affirm) because the clouds of God's wrath gathered thick over the human race and required a victim and could find that victim only in Jesus. It was simply because the Divine love, by the death of the Messiah, opened out a new justification, that of Faith, and provided that all men of every nation might be admissible by this new way to the fold of the spiritual Christ, even though they were 'sinners,' and *he* were the Jewish Messiah born 'under the law.'

Such was the fundamental conception which lay at the base of the early Christian belief—a conception perfectly intelligible and rational in the light of the then prevailing ways of thought and reasoning, though it has lost much of its cogency and applicability in these modern times, with their altered ideas and circumstances.

This effect of the Death in admitting the Gentiles to discipleship is alluded to in a great variety of expressions, partly literal, partly only figurative. Every thing which the ancient sacrifices were supposed to do in connection with the pardon of sin is said to result from the death of the Messiah, and a great deal more. Jesus is 'the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,'—being thus

in evident metaphor likened to the victim slain in the sacrifices of atonement under the ancient law. 'He was made sin for us' (that is, by a probable Hebraism, he was condemned, treated as a sinner). He was 'made a curse for us,' because every one that is hanged on a tree, as he was, was accounted accursed. He 'bare our sins in his own body on the tree,' and by his stripes 'we are healed':—all these figurative expressions being simply various ways of conveying the same radical thought. It was the sins of men, ritual as well as moral, actual or only imputed, which unfitted them to be his disciples, so long as he was in life, a Hebrew under the law: his death released *him* from this restraint and permitted *them* to become his disciples. He thus, in an obvious sense, 'bare' their sins and delivered them from the condemnation which the law was understood to pronounce on all sin. Thus too he is 'our peace' and 'ye [Gentiles] who sometime were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ,' *Ephes. ii.* He is 'a propitiation (or propitiatory sacrifice) set forth in (or by) his blood'—and through him 'we have received the reconciliation,' *Rom. iii. 25*, in Revised version; also *Rom. v. 11.*

There is a great variety of such phrases, nearly all of a figurative character. but nowhere necessarily conveying the old orthodox ideas of atonement.

There is nothing in them to tell us that the Heavenly Father needed *propitiating*, in the heathen sense of this word; nothing to tell us that the sacrifice of Christ was made 'to reconcile his Father to us,' or that it was in its essence a punishment borne by him, whether for 'original guilt' or for 'the actual sins of men.' The reconciliation effected is that of man to God, not of God to man; as Paul writes, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.'

The expressions under notice are numerous and varied. The Christian writers fell into them quite naturally ; or rather, we should say, they were unavoidable to men familiar with the sacrificial usages of their nation. The error of later times has been in taking so many of them in a literal and purely modern sense ; in allowing so little for Jewish forms of thought and feeling ; in overlooking the historical considerations which alone can give true life and meaning to the expressions referred to ; and in substituting, for such considerations, theories and doctrines, which are purely arbitrary, to say nothing of the fact that the subjects to which they relate are wholly beyond the reach or the grasp of human thought.

The exposition above given has been derived from the more important Epistles of Paul, those to the Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, in particular. It would appear, however, that in some of the later New Testament writings what may be termed an expansion of the earlier doctrine respecting the death is to be traced. Expressions occurring in the narratives of the Supper, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the Fourth Gospel, and in the First Epistle of John would seem to convey the ideas of expiation and atonement in the old Hebraic sense. The remark also applies to phrases in the book of *Revelation* and in the Epistles of Peter. On the other hand it should be noticed how entirely absent from the account of the crucifixion is any allusion to the supposed expiatory character of the event related, as this has been ordinarily represented by theologians. In the Fourth Gospel, for example, the long narrative of the trial and its results gives not the slightest intimation that the death on the cross was in any sense a sacrifice possessed of some occult propitiatory or atoning efficacy. How is such an omission, in such a writing, so long after the event, to be accounted for, on the common

theory as to its marvellous nature? The same is true of the other Gospels. Dr. Horton seems to make light of this omission, asking only why so much circumstantial prominence is given in the Gospels to 'the exit' of Jesus from life. This question he asks, but without suggesting the answer which ought to have been forthcoming! Doubtless, we may reply, the deep interest of the scenes depicted, the character of the sufferer, the natural human sympathy awakened in the spectators, are sufficient to account for the detail with which the story is related. But on the ordinary orthodox supposition as to the efficacy of the cross, is it possible to conceive that the evangelical narratives should have made no allusion whatever either to the Divine nature of the sufferer or to the world-wide consequences of his death, that they should have left out of sight the greatest, most stupendous fact of all—if it were only real—that in that crucified Jesus, who is there nailed to the cross and there bows his head and dies, just like one of the malefactors beside him, that in his person, thus lifted up and crucified, it is not simply a human being that we are looking upon, but even God Himself?—that in his sufferings and death there is consummated the redemption of the world? The writers of these narratives it is alleged, knew all this, but they say nothing about it! They were writing for the information of succeeding generations of disciples, but they make no allusion to it! They were writing many years after the event, when there was no conceivable reason for withholding their testimony, when there was every conceivable reason for proclaiming it to their readers, and yet they fail to give us the remotest hint as to the true character of the occurrence of which they speak. Not one word proceeds from them respecting that greatest fact of all, compared with which everything else sinks into utter insignificance.

Yet, as before observed, it is easy to think that a certain expansion of the Pauline doctrine, did, in the course of time, take place. The idea of atonement in the older sense, could hardly fail to occur sooner or later, to Jewish Christian writers, in connection with an event which to their minds operated so plainly for the virtual remission of sins, in the sense above indicated. It may even be that Paul himself had in his mind, in some instances, the more literal sacrificial meaning of words which he uses; while yet their practical significance as he uses them had reference simply to the release of the Messiah and the redemption of the disciple from the claims of the law. Many of the expressions now in view are unquestionably figurative (as *Rev.* i. 5, *1 Pet.* i. 19, ii. 24), the only question being what is the exact literal thought which they really cover. It may be the ordinary idea of expiation. Adopting this view of the subject, the reader may understand that the death of Christ would gradually come to be spoken of as possessed of a certain sacrificial efficacy. In effect it redeemed from the condemnation due to sin, those to whom it was the means of giving access to Christ by faith. The thought of this would readily take the form of expiation in minds already pre-occupied with the ancient beliefs connected with sacrifices. Disciples of Jewish birth would naturally incline to this mode of thought, and be led in the result to the use of words implying the old ideas of expiation and propitiation by the sacrifice of victims. Such ideas would find acceptance with Gentile converts also. Nevertheless, do they not conflict with the higher sense of the Divine Fatherhood and Love, even as these were entertained and expressed by Christ himself, and by him who was the greatest of his apostles?

It is obvious from the foregoing exposition how vain

must be the attempt to build up upon the New Testament language respecting the death of Christ the elaborate speculative structures to be found in modern works on the subject; theories about the wrath of God; about the transfer of punishment from the guilty sinner to an innocent substitute; about the confidential arrangement between God and Christ for the rescue of a miserable world from the dominion of Satan; about 'the grandest moment in the moral history of God';—all such ideas as these being simply the wild and presumptuous flights of non-scriptural theology, and entirely without warrant in the Christian writings.

It is well again to observe, as a final consideration, that the various expressions which have now been briefly reviewed, arose out of very special feelings, and circumstances of the primitive Christian times. Those expressions formed in effect an argument most suitable to Jewish converts of Paul's time. But their permanent value is unimportant—except only as they imply or set forth in a peculiar way the essential impartiality and comprehensiveness of the Gospel. There is nothing known to us in the actual or natural relations of God and man which can make it incumbent upon the modern disciple to return to the forms of thought embodied in such language. Its entire force and propriety belonged to, and are exhausted in connection with circumstances, feelings, institutions, persons, that have long since passed away from the stage of mortal existence, leaving nothing behind them in which such phraseology can in our time have any fitting use or application. Nobody now, however 'ritualistic' he may be, will doubt that a man may be a Christian without being circumcised, or conforming in any other way to the ceremonial law.¹ If there were a great sect among us

¹ Yet our Congregational friends appear to find it expedient to proclaim that

maintaining this, then we might plead that Christ 'died for us,' that he has redeemed us from the curse of the law, 'being made a curse for us,' that 'we have redemption through his blood,' that a new 'justification' has been provided for us admitting to discipleship 'without the deeds of the law.' But such phrases cannot now be used with any rational force or sense. They belong to the past; and the sooner the past is left in quiet possession of them by popular teachers and preachers of every name and degree, the better surely it will be for the credit of Christian learning and the peace of the Church.

§ 7. The latest Theory—Ditheism.

Considering the great position which the Atonement has held in systematic theology from Luther downwards, it is a little surprising to find how lightly the subject is passed over in the comprehensive and elaborate work of Dr. Fairbairn.¹ So much is this the case, in the few pages devoted to it (479-492), that the question is suggested whether or not the respected author can regard the doctrine as possessed of the supreme importance usually ascribed to it, and which, if it were a great truth of Christian theology, would really belong to it. Besides this, such exposition as there is in this volume presents far too much of the same kind of speculative, arbitrary, and semi-metaphysical treatment which is so common in works on the subject and which has been noticed more fully in our preceding pages. There is a singular absence of the direct

'they are justified through faith in Christ' . . . and *not* by 'the works of the law.'—It might almost seem that someone had been seeking to impose upon them the ancient yoke, as happened to the Galatians of old! *Declaration of Faith*, xiii.

¹ *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*. By A. M. Fairbairn, D.D., &c., 1894.

testimony from the Christian books which in such a question is all-important. It is not too much to say that evidence of this kind is almost entirely wanting.

Is this significant? Are our Congregational friends beginning to find out that there is no doctrine of Atonement?—to hold with Dr. Horton that the ‘orthodoxy of the New Testament’ does not include such a feature?—that it gives us only the bare fact of atonement, whatever this may be, while we, inquirers into things divine, are left to grope our way in the dark, without Scriptural light or guidance?

Some account of the doctrine, however, *may* be found in Dr. Fairbairn’s pages. The Atonement, he tells us, ‘works in the universe as the manifest and embodied judgment of God against sin.’ . . . ‘It is designed to create in man all the effects of corrective and remedial sufferings; to do the work of restorative and reformatory penalties: It burns into the soul of the sinner the sense of the evil and the shame of sin, forces him to look at it with God’s eyes, to judge it with His conscience, to hate it with His hate.’ Many readers will object to the strangely anthropomorphic character of these expressions; others will ask the question, *WHAT is it*, that has worked in the universe these startling and hitherto unheard-of effects? It is indicated only by the word ‘Atonement,’ which is not, as we have seen, a New Testament word at all, and ought to be replaced by the term Reconciliation. Further, as to the description of what the Atonement *does* and how it *works* in the universe, we have to ask, How does that description harmonise with the statements of theologians before named? One of these may be dismissed at once, for he declines to consider either what the Atonement is, or how it ‘works,’ and virtually tells us that we know nothing about it. Another is more explicit. He declares

that by the Atonement Christ took upon him the sufferings 'which ought to have been ours'; and thus surely the Death does *not* 'burn into the soul' the sense of the enormity of sin; it rather tends to lessen that sense by shewing how easily punishment may be transferred from the actual sinner and put upon a substitute. The learned writer in *Lux Mundi* again is contented to say that the Atonement enables men to bear the punishment of sin, not with any inburnt sense of shame but 'gladly'; and so do these notable authorities traverse or even contradict one another, thus in effect throwing an obvious discredit upon the doctrine which it is their desire to uphold.

When, again, Dr. Fairbairn affirms of the Atonement that it burns into the soul of the sinner the sense of the evil and the shame of sin, the questions are inevitable, To how many of the miserably sinful men met with in daily life does this highly wrought description apply? Where are they to be seen? How does the author *know* of their existence, or of the sense of evil and the burning shame within them which their misdeeds deserve, and which, alas, callous and hardened men apparently so little feel? Such assertions as these are surely but dreams of the same conjectural and speculative order which prevails so largely in all these Atonement schemes. They are without foundation equally in the realities of common experience and in the words of the New Testament.

Dr. Fairbairn's account of what the Atonement must be is followed by a passage which strangely speaks of the 'pain' and 'sorrow' of 'the Father' in the presence of the evil of the universe. It would be satisfactory to know the source of this intimate knowledge of the Divine mind—seeing that we may look for it in vain in the words either of Christ or of any Christian apostle. Perhaps the explanation is implied in such phrases as the following:

'What was innermost in God' is said to be revealed to us by the Incarnation: by this the 'complete revelation of God as He is in Himself and to Himself' is 'disclosed to man'; again, 'the sense of man's evil and misery became the [Divine] impulse to speak and to help,' and thus led to the 'surrender of the Son.' These extraordinary statements suggest the question, Was not the supreme holiness and intolerance of sin plainly revealed to the Hebrews of old, centuries before Christ was born? In *Isaiah*, for example, chapters i., ii., v.; can anything stronger than this prophetic denunciation of wickedness be found in connection with Christ? So it is in *Micah* and in other prophets. What then can be meant by the doctrine (pp. 485-6) that the Divine attitude towards sin was first or specially revealed to man by the Atonement and the 'suffering it cost the eternal Father?'

There remains for notice a point of the highest importance in connection with these discussions. It concerns what may be termed the ditheistic character so frequently apparent in the argument, on the orthodox side of the question. From the nature of the case this non-Christian element is evidently inseparable from it; and the same element is exemplified in Dr. Fairbairn's volume much as in other works that might be mentioned. He writes: 'Theology has no falsier idea than that of the impassibility of God'; and affirms thus: 'The Father did suffer, though it was not as the Son that He suffered, but in modes distinct and different.' 'Distinct and different.' Then were there not *Two* that suffered—one distinctly and differently from the other? How could there be distinct and different 'modes' of suffering, if there were only *one* sufferer? So again: 'He who gave to duty had not the reward of him who rejoiced to do it'; and once again: 'The humiliation of the Son involved the visible passion and death, but the

surrender of the Father involved the sorrow that was the invisible sacrifice.' (Fairbairn, p. 484). Two persons and two divine sufferers, again; one acting to surrender and one in humiliation and death; *two*, not *one*; or are we, in these theological speculations, expected to take leave of ordinary logic and common sense?

It has been noticed above that in this section of Dr. Fairbairn's work there is no adequate use of evidence from Scripture, no appeal such as was to be expected to either Law or Testimony for the various propositions which he lays before us. There is a slight exception to this: following the words last quoted we read (p. 484): 'And this is the Biblical doctrine, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son"; "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all"; "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins"'; 'But what,' the author exclaims, 'do these verses mean, if not that the essence and act of sacrifice was the surrender of the Son by the Father?' A little investigation of the meaning by looking beneath the surface of the sacred page, yields a reasonable answer to this question. Jesus according to the fourth Gospel, was the Divine Logos incarnate; that is, he was the manifestation of the will and wisdom of the distant and invisible Supreme in the form of a human being. As such, he was pre-eminently entitled to the appellation Son; the Logos is so termed by Philo long before the fourth Gospel was in existence. Jesus, again, as the Hebrew Messiah was also, according to Hebrew ideas, the beloved Son. In another and equivalent form of expression, he was the 'only begotten Son.'¹ Thus from

¹ He might also be termed an 'only begotten God,' seeing that the Logos was God himself in his outward manifestation in Christ: 'only begotten,' in the sense (sometimes) of 'dearly beloved,' as an only son; but in reference to the Logos in a more metaphysical sense. See *John* i. 1; i. 18, in Revised version.

two sides, so to speak, the Christ was emphatically the Son. Yet, contrary to all expectation on the part of the disciples, the heavenly Father for his own purposes allowed the bearer of this august character to suffer and die, as abundantly shewn and illustrated in the preceding section of this Essay.

In this there was nothing occult or incomprehensible, as it is set forth in the New Testament. There is nothing to indicate to us sacrifice or suffering on the part of the Divine Father, any more than when He allows any good man to be the victim of persecution and death, as often has occurred in the history of the world. But yet one great mystery is said to have been involved in the death of the Messiah, only it was not of the kind which orthodox theology desiderates! It was hidden, St. Paul tells us, from the foundation of the world, and it was this, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs with ancient Israel, *Ephes.* iii., as before cited. And to open the way for their admission the Divine purposes required the surrender, the death, even of the beloved Son and that surrender was made; but all Dr. Fairbairn's ingenious speculation respecting the sorrow and suffering of God in allowing such a result is in truth only an outburst of the merest imaginative theorizing, seeing that there is little or nothing to this effect in the New Testament.

As to the words 'propitiation for our sins,' the sense in which those words might be used has been sufficiently pointed out in the preceding sections. Jesus by the influence of his life and death was the true propitiation and propitiatory sacrifice, in as much as he thus achieved the great work, not of appeasing the heavenly Father, the source and manifestor of love itself, but simply of reconciling and bringing men to God,—the same purpose which was supposed to be effected by the observances and sacrifices of the ancient ceremonial law.

Mr. Gladstone on the Atonement.

Since the foregoing pages were in type, a new phase of this many-phased doctrine has come into view. It is from the pen of no less a personage than the late Prime Minister of England, and may be read in the *Nineteenth Century* for September, 1894. Mr. Gladstone's treatment of the subject can only receive the very slightest notice here, within the compass of this single page. His exposition, it will be found, takes its own independent line, thus again illustrating the vagueness and uncertainty of the doctrine. But, wonderful to tell, he not only takes his own line, but also in effect sets aside the teaching of the Thirty-nine Articles. In so doing, his remarks exhibit the same purely speculative character and neglect of historical considerations of which perhaps enough has been said in these pages. Deviation from the Articles—while hardly to be expected in an avowed and zealous Anglican—is no doubt in these days a pardonable form of profession without belief. For who among instructed men, even in the ranks of the clergy, can be reasonably expected, in this the nineteenth century, to restrict his theology within the limits of sixteenth century Articles? But why then, it may be asked, publicly profess to do so? Why does not the distinguished writer of the article above referred to seek, from his eminent position, to give a true liberty of thought and speech to those upon whom the burden of subscription is believed to sit so heavily? Such questions I do not venture to answer, or attempt to answer, in this place; as, indeed it is not within my present space to say one word more on this fruitful and dangerously suggestive theme.

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